

education bill which truly will help students in California and throughout the country. I have been touring the schools in my district to find out from teachers, administrators, parents, and students what they need from the Federal Government when it comes to education policy.

I think the bill that was reported from the Education Committee makes an excellent start toward helping our students achieve success. I am pleased with the increased funding levels for title I, the education program for disadvantaged students, and the increased targeting of funds to low-income areas and at-risk students.

I am also extremely happy with what is not in the bill—private school vouchers. The Education Committee voted to eliminate the voucher provisions and I hope the House will vote to keep vouchers out of the bill as well. We should be focusing on improving our public schools, rather than using public funds to send students to private schools. Vouchers don't make sense for Los Angeles area students. The \$1,500 voucher proposed by President Bush wouldn't be enough money to send a child to a private school in Los Angeles. And we simply don't have enough private schools willing to accept students with vouchers.

Although I am happy with the bill, I do have some concerns. I had hoped that the Republican leadership would have allowed Democrats the opportunity to improve this bill through amendments. Unfortunately, we were not offered that opportunity. I wanted to offer an amendment to allow community learning centers to use their funds to implement programs which would help immigrant students with language and life skills. A similar amendment passed the other body by a 96–0 vote, and I had hoped the House would have the opportunity to vote on the amendment. Unfortunately, we were denied that opportunity.

Also, I had hoped that a school construction amendment offered by my colleague from New York, Mr. OWENS, would have been made in order for consideration today. California's efforts to reduce class size and our dramatic population increases have combined to make school construction essential. I am very disappointed that the House won't have the opportunity to vote on school construction today.

I also have concerns with portions of the bill dealing with bilingual and immigrant education, and hope they can be improved as the bill moves through the legislative process. As our recent census numbers show us, bilingual and immigrant students are no longer solely the responsibility of States like California, Texas, Florida, and New York. We must be prepared to dramatically increase the funding for this program in order to meet the needs of states like Arkansas and Georgia, which are experiencing a large influx of immigrant and bilingual children.

This bill also recommends that students be moved out of bilingual classrooms into English-only programs within three years. This provision is overly restrictive and has no basis in academic research. There is no evidence that students can learn a new language within 3 years. Mandating a time limit on bilingual education impedes the ability of school districts to tailor their instruction to children's individual needs.

I am also unhappy with the provision in H.R. 1 which require schools districts to try and re-

ceive a parent's permission before putting a child into a bilingual education program. Requiring parents to "opt-in" in order to place their children in bilingual education is unfair. It places the burden of educating an English-learning student on the parent, rather than the school. In addition, there could also be a significant delay in a child's access to appropriate educational services as the parent and school deal with the administrative paperwork required to place a child in a bilingual education program.

I think we have a very good education bill before us today. I know that some of my Republican colleagues will offer amendments to add private school vouchers or to block grant important education programs. I urge my colleagues to oppose these efforts and keep the important reforms made in the base bill.

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Chairman, there are some good things in this bill, but it has some very serious flaws, particularly the failure to fund school modernization and the tremendously damaging changes proposed in the permissible uses of funds under the title I program.

The distinctive characteristic of Federal participation in elementary and secondary education has always been that Federal funding is targeted to reach the needs of students who come from low-income families. I firmly believe that we must continue this targeting. Unfortunately, by diluting the targeting of title I funds, H.R. 1 fails our students from low-income families and continues the movement toward abandoning our commitment to them.

The title I program and the law were designed to reach those American children who come from low-income families. The formula for title I is driven by individual poverty; the number of children who qualify for free lunches determines the amount of money that goes to a school district.

Currently, under title I, local education agencies target funds to schools with the highest percentage of children from low-income families. Unless a participating school is operating a "schoolwide" program, the school must target Title I services to children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet State academic standards.

When the program was created in 1965, the eligibility threshold for using title I funds to operate "schoolwide" programs was 75 percent. Let me repeat that again. Originally, 75 percent of students in a given school had to be poor in order for a school to be able to use title I funds in schoolwide programs.

H.R. 1, as reported, lowers the poverty eligibility threshold for schoolwide programs from 50 percent to 40 percent. This change means that 60 percent of the students in that school do not have to qualify as poor; yet they will reap the benefits of title I funds.

I am for helping all students in our public schools, but not by lowering the poverty threshold to 40 percent, and diluting the program's focus on poor children. Simply put, we are taking from the poor to give to those who are more fortunate. This is not the way to bridge the so-called achievement gap.

The proposed change in the poverty eligibility threshold is just the latest installment in the Congress' abandonment of students from low-income families, the very students who historically have been the focus, and the intended beneficiaries of the title I program. If H.R. 1 passes in this form, we will have gone

from targeting the Federal Government's primary program in education to help the poor from schools with poverty levels of 75 percent to schools with poverty levels of 40 percent. This seems to me very radical and very unwise.

Education is the number one issue for all Americans, in large part because a good education is critical to achieving the American dream. We should focus our Federal investment on those that need it the most. The proposed change to title I is misguided and wrong. We should take a fresh look at this critical issue.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 1. I am pleased that we are working on this education legislation so early in the 107th Congress and that this legislation will provide more funding for all of our Nation's schools.

The basics of this bill include developing and implementing high academic standards, helping students achieve these standards with local, State, and Federal funding and requiring some level of accountability for student achievement.

With a strong focus on improving reading skills and literacy, this legislation will help strengthen the foundation that all children need in order to succeed in school. Coupled with increased funding for title I programs which focus on helping disadvantaged students achieve high standards, this reading initiative will make a significant impact in children's lives.

As cochair of the Congressional Child Care Caucus, I am particularly pleased with the Reading First Initiative with its funds targeting children ages three through five. These competitive grants will aid in the development of verbal skills, phonetic awareness, prereading development and assistance training for the professional development of teachers in child care centers or Head Start centers. If we are to expect our children to achieve great academic success in elementary and secondary school, it is vitally important that their teachers are ready and able to meet the challenges of everyday instruction in the classroom.

Moreover, our Nation's teachers are called upon to act as surrogate parents, counselors, confidants, and security officers, in addition to their basic responsibilities of educating students on a daily basis. With many teachers choosing to leave the profession, we need to help retain them and by providing the necessary funding for training and professional development, as well as a teacher mentoring program, hopefully we can retain the best and brightest in their profession and prevent a massive shortage which is anticipated in New York State.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, as well as the Dunn amendment for school security program funding, the Meek amendment for student mentoring programs and the Mink amendment for new teacher mentoring. This legislation is a right first step towards strengthening and improving our Nation's public education system.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 1—the Leave No Child Behind Act of 2001, in large measure because the members of the Education and Workforce Committee were able to come together on a bipartisan basis to forge an agreement on a major education reform bill which would hold public schools accountable for improving the